

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR RURAL SCHOOL ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS

*Given rural school administrators' challenges and the need to support their leadership development, this qualitative study describes how one rural school district delivered professional development through a university-school partnership to prepare its assistant principals for their work. Methods: Eight assistant principals from nine schools participated in the yearlong program. Data were collected in meetings, classroom observations, and school visits during 2005–06. Findings: Results describe how organizational socialization of assistant principals was accomplished in terms of the five aspects of the program. Interruptions in delivery are presented along with how participants acted independently. School, district, and central administration personnel were all involved, at times making it complicated to deliver professional development. Specific recommendations relate to what researchers and practitioners might do to sustain socialization and successful retention of new assistants.*

Interestingly, principals in rural settings have greater professional development needs than their counterparts in urban and suburban school districts (Howley, Chadwick, & Howley, 2002). They tend to have less education, are more geographically isolated from peers, have a wider range of role responsibilities, and have higher turnover rates (Arnold, 2005; Howley et al., 2002). Like their urban and suburban counterparts, their work involves securing qualified faculty and staff members as well as ensuring sufficient financial resources for school operations. But they are also faced with pressures associated with school consolidations, closures, and a declining economic base within their rural communities (Barley & Beesley, 2007). The scope of their work is usually broader than in other districts as they are situated in small, often remotely located regions of the country. According to Arnold, Newman, Gaddy and Dean (2005), “being a rural administrator is a difficult job that fewer and fewer people are willing to take” (p. 18). At present, few studies on leadership development in rural education exist, particularly about recruiting and retaining capable rural school leaders (Arnold, 2005; Arnold et al., 2005; Browne-Ferrigno & Allen, 2006; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009).

Given the challenges in rural school administrators' work and the need for more research on their leadership development, this qualitative study describes how one rural school district delivered a promising professional development program designed to prepare newly appointed assistant principals to work in their district. As a partner in the program, I served as the university member in partnership with the school district

administration. My role throughout the yearlong program was as participant-observer directly involved in planning, preparing, and delivering the professional development in monthly sessions at various school sites. As researcher, I attempted to examine the delivery of the program through the lens of organizational socialization blended with leadership preparation.

While this study is described extensively in a chapter on leadership preparation (Enomoto, 2011), this article extends the research base by integrating the recent literature on leadership preparation based on successful university-school district professional development partnerships. Drawing from organizational rather than professional socialization, I describe how the rural school district's program was actually delivered on-site and how it attempted to socialize assistant principals into their work as school leaders. Implications from the study are offered for both researchers and practitioners in university-school district collaborations.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Leadership Preparation Programs**

Leadership preparation often begins with transitioning from teacher to department head or curriculum coordinator, and culminates in formal university training and licensure to become an educational administrator (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2009). Findings have shown a gap between what is learned in formal preparation and what is needed for principals to succeed in their schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2004; Walker & Qian, 2006). Traditional university preparation for educational administrators has been criticized as the profession becomes more complex and the challenges in schools more demanding (Howley, Andrianaivo, & Perry, 2005; Levine, 2005).

In response to these criticisms, many programs have developed exemplary pre-service and in-service preparations (Browne-Ferrigno & Maynard, 2005; Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2007; Orr, 2011; Orr & Barber, 2007; Pounder, 2011). For example, Darling-Hammond, La Pointe, Meyerson, Orr and Cohen (2009) report on eight noteworthy principal preparation programs. Beginning with attention on recruitment and rigorous selection, these district-based, in-service programs were aimed to develop a comprehensive approach through connected learning opportunities informed by theory and practice relevant to teaching and learning in schools. Three features characterizing district efforts to support such programs were (a) a learning continuum from pre-service through induction and career development; (b) learning that was grounded in practice; and (c) collegial learning networks such as principal networks, study groups, mentoring, and peer coaching. Districts were seen as important partners in connecting experiential learning opportunities for prospective principal leaders.

Highlighting the traits of innovative leadership preparation programs, Pounder (2011) reported that effective leadership preparation programs have these features:

A strong instructional leadership focus, knowledgeable faculty who use active learning instructional strategies to engage adult learners, supportive program structures (e.g., cohort models, course schedule, class accessibility) that encourage positive student relationships and enhance professional socialization and induction, and authentic internship and field experiences designed to enhance experiential learning and skill development (p. 263).

Together with quality internships and mentoring, the outcomes for leaders and schools demonstrate better placements, increased school and teacher climates, and school improvement, albeit moderated by challenging school conditions such as student poverty, declining enrollments, limited resources, and other factors.

Beyond the features of innovative leadership preparation programs, Crow (2006) offers a cautionary reminder, that there is a need for more conceptual understanding of socialization in line with the dynamic and complex work of a school administrator. This appears especially important in preparing rural administrators because of their remote locations. To that end, this study attempts to blend organizational socialization with leadership preparation.

## **Organizational Socialization**

Numerous researchers have considered how organizational socialization informs leadership preparation to guide the approach to professional development (Armstrong, 2010; Browne-Ferrigno & Maynard, 2005; Crow, 2006; 2007; Hart, 1993; Heck, 1995; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Parkay, Currie, & Rhodes, 1992; Stevenson, 2006). By definition, organizational socialization refers to how individuals break from the past and learn new roles within the organization (Jones, 1986). This conceptual framework is especially useful in considering how veteran teachers might approach becoming and succeeding as school administrators. Different from professional socialization, which focuses on university preparation for school administrators, organizational socialization considers what is occurring onsite in actual practice. As was noted earlier, university preparation may be insufficient to meet the challenges facing beginning principals (Crow, 2006; Howley et al., 2005; Levine, 2005; Walker & Qian, 2006).

Unfortunately, many school leaders receive little support once appointed to their positions. Their induction into the profession has been described as “sink or swim socialization” (Hart, 1993). Many new principals feel abandoned in the first years on the job, left on their own to fend for themselves, and often only receive attention when problems occur in their schools (Bolman & Deal, 2002; Daresh, 2001; Draper & McMichael,

2000; Fink & Brayman, 2006). Already anxious and frustrated over their new roles, beginning principals might have to fit into an existing school culture (Walker & Qian, 2006). With the responsibility for effective school functioning clearly placed upon them, it is not surprising that many administrators feel isolated, overwhelmed, and overworked. Bauer and Brazer (2011) posit that principal isolation, especially for new administrations, might factor into how individuals respond to their work environments. Recognizing this need for supporting administrators in their work lives, some school districts have made efforts to deal with these new experiences and challenges. Leadership academies, mentoring, coaching, targeted inservice, and career development are some examples of these recent efforts (Conley & Cooper, 2011).

Research in educational administration tends to be about the principalship despite the majority of educational leaders starting their administrative careers as assistant principals. Earlier studies like Marshall (1985, 1992) as well as more recently, Daresh (2001) and Marshall and Hooley (2006) have explored the socialization of assistant principals in terms of role development and enculturation. Daresh (2001) contrasts the dilemma for those aspiring to become instructional leaders while having to meet narrowly configured job expectations and managerial responsibilities as assistant principals. Armstrong (2010) emphasizes that while principals and their assistants might share roles in leading schools, their socialization experiences are not the same. Power and position in the administrative hierarchy make for different kinds of challenges, pressures, and ultimately different ways to learn and perform their duties.

In this study, the assistant principals were acknowledged as active agents, constructing their interpretations of ongoing events rather than simply responding to their work roles. During the socialization process, they could be seen as internalizing the values, beliefs, and norms of administration to become part of the leadership (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Hart, 1991, 1993; Leithwood, Steinbach & Begley, 1992). At the same time, their independent actions suggest that the socialization is bi-directional and dynamic (Crow & Matthews, 1998; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). This view of one's active engagement in socialization was appropriate in examining how assistant principals develop as leaders, evolving from their role as teachers within the same school or rural district. Research has shown the value of such an approach. Learning what is expected on the job, leaders can become more competent over time and even more satisfied, thus likely to remain on the job (Conley & Cooper, 2011; Falcione & Wilson, 1988; Lester, 1987; Morrison, 1993; Orr & Barber, 2007).

Rural administrators need more than their urban or suburban counterparts because of geographic isolation from peers and resources. In a rural early career principal academy in Ohio, Howley, Chadwick and Howley (2002) identified features such as mentoring and networking through small study groups to be valuable components to mitigate the ef-

fects of that geographic isolation. Similarly, Peterson and Kelley (2001) found that networking was possible through inter-district collaborations, distance learning technologies, and summer institutes.

Also important was setting high expectations for school leaders, as noted by district administrators' reflections about the professional development initiated for principals in rural Kentucky (Browne-Ferrigno & Allen, 2006). Recognizing the rural district's needs and challenges, superintendents and their leadership teams reframed their expectations of principals from that of school managers to be viewed as instructional leaders. Through a joint university-district collaboration, they re-envisioned educational leadership with different role and work expectations for school principals. They recruited principals who would "both make a difference with students and make a commitment to stay in Pike County" (p. 7). Intensive professional development that was reflective, job embedded and delivered over time made this leadership shift possible.

The current study examined how one rural school district actually delivered its professional development and demonstrated a commitment to preparing newly appointed school assistant principals (APs). What was the school district doing to ensure that these individuals knew the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of their work as school leaders? How were these APs individually responding and reacting as novice administrators, many having been veteran teachers at the same school? To what extent were they "inexperienced and unprepared administrators left to manage?" What considerations were given to succession planning and systematic socialization into school administration in these rural communities? These initial questions guided the investigation of what was occurring in the professional development program.

## Methods

This qualitative study was based on a yearlong collaboration with the school district leadership to deliver professional development sessions and drew from ethnographic methods in order to achieve the research aims (Merriam, 2001; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Specifically, participant observations were conducted of the new leaders-in-training at meetings, during classroom observations, and school visits in the 2005–2006 school year. The participants were eight assistant principals in a rural district of nine schools in three communities. Other informants in the study included the school district superintendent, an adjunct consultant who served as a mentor for new principals, nine school principals, and several school resource personnel involved in leadership preparation at various times during the school year. To retain confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to all names of individuals and places.

While planning meetings began in early spring, data were primarily collected once the school year began in August and drawn from

participant observations at 18 onsite administrator meetings, 11 days of classroom visits to different schools, and 13 planning meetings with the superintendent and others. Data included field notes of observations, meeting arrangements, interview transcripts, and documents relevant to the school district (e.g., school policies, procedures, related newspaper articles, and school website information).

Since the intent of the research study was primarily to explore how socialization occurred in the field, participants were observed as they interacted and constructed their understandings about leadership development. Rather than generate propositions ahead of time, inductive reasoning was used in examining the professional development shaping these educational leaders as they learned their roles and responsibilities in the school district. The phenomenon of professional leadership development was considered as it was evolving in the field (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Wolcott, 1994; 2001).

Because of my position as a university faculty member and consultant to the district, I was a direct participant in planning, organizing, and delivering sessions for the assistant principals' group. I was personally invested in making sure that the leadership sessions were designed and delivered in the best way possible under the direction of the district superintendent with a team of other presenters. Our preparatory sessions were collaborative and needed to be flexible. Observation and interview data were solicited and validated by talking with both the superintendent and the consultant mentor before and after sessions. Through this means, researcher biases were kept in check.

In the next sections, a brief description of the school district is given followed by the assistant principals' professional development program as designed and actually implemented. Following those descriptions and a presentation of findings, I discuss what was learned about the professional leadership preparation of these rural administrators.

### **ABC's Leadership Development Program**

Like many school districts across the country, the state of Hawaii's public education system is facing a leadership crisis with the majority of its principals and assistants approaching retirement age, two-thirds of the current administrators being 52 years of age and older (Daniel, Enomoto, & Miller, 2003). There were vacancies in 40% of the assistant principal positions around the state, with those in rural and some urban pockets higher than in other areas. The recruitment and retention of administrators involve (a) identifying qualified staff members, (b) providing professional development opportunities that were both timely and relevant, and (c) linking training with successful promotion of students' educational achievement.

Organizationally, recruitment and retention of school level administrators were handled by central administration. Unique among the US states, Hawaii maintains a single public education system distributed over 15 school

districts (called complex areas). At the direction of the statewide school board, the state superintendent oversees all operations with the help of 15 district superintendents in charge of high schools and their respective feeder schools (i.e., elementary and middle grade levels). While the recruitment and professional development activities of new administrators are handled centrally by the state system, district superintendents are expected to hire, supervise, and support the administrators within their respective districts.

The Able-Baker-Charlie (ABC) School District served students in three distinct communities in a sparsely populated area of the state. Able community was the most remote, located over 60 miles from the nearest micropolitan area (i.e., 10,000–50,000 residents). It included one K–12 school and one K–7 elementary school, totaling 860 students. The second community, Baker, had four public schools (two elementary, one middle, and a newly constructed high school) serving 2,662 students from small towns and villages in the area. Eighty percent of the students commuted to school, many relying on subsidized school bus service, being transported from as far as 22 miles away. An established rural township with several historic villages, Charlie community was experiencing demographic changes with a steadily increasing number of school-aged children in the area. With two elementary schools and one secondary (grades 7–12), total student enrollment was 1,699.

All nine schools were considered to be high-need and diverse in terms of their multi-ethnic student demographics. There were high percentages of free or reduced-lunch recipients as well as many students with special needs and limited English proficiency. Seven schools in the district had changes in leadership with at least two principals within the last five years. Details of the three communities and schools in the district are described extensively in an earlier book chapter (Enomoto, 2011).

### **Program and Participants**

Initiated by district superintendent Regina Zane, the school district's professional development program was designed for in-servicing assistant principals as the first step toward becoming principals. While initial discussions about the program began in the spring, the first planning meeting was held in October 2005. At that time, Ms. Zane, consultant-mentor, Sonia Stephens, and I, as the university researcher/partner, discussed a range of topics that participants were interested in as well as the content we felt was needed for their professional development. Specific topics included curriculum development, student discipline procedures, facilities management, preparation for special education inclusion, employee mediation and arbitration, treatment of student referrals, and provision for student support services.

We considered how professional development might be offered over two to three years and agreed to develop the following skills in the par-

ticipants: (a) become good investigators of problems, (b) be collaborative and communicate effectively with faculty, staff and peers, (c) become continuous learners in their profession, and (d) demonstrate leadership with vision and initiative; all within the context of improving teaching and learning in the participants' schools. To foster these skills, we decided that each leadership preparation session would contain five aspects: (a) content and information coupled with skill building, (b) application to academic standards, student support, and school systems, (c) opportunities to network with peers and others, (d) conversations with the principals who supervised their work, and (e) personal reflections and opportunities for feedback. After these initial plans were made, monthly dates were established for the assistant principals to meet. Seven meetings were actually held; the March 2006 meeting was cancelled due to inclement weather. At the June meeting, both principals and assistants gathered together for year-end sharing.

Eight assistant principals (APs) from the ABC District participated in this program. Only six of the nine schools in the district were represented among the participants because secondary or combined schools usually had one or two APs and only one elementary school had an AP. Of the participants, six were females (Arlene, Cecilia, Nanette, Olivia, Rochelle, Terri); two were males (Norman, Roger). Four of the eight (Cecilia, Norman, Rochelle, Terri) were relatively new to administration, serving temporarily and not yet certified by the central administration. At the time, Terri and Norman were seeking certification and attending the assistant principals' academy organized by central administration. Four APs (Arlene, Nanette, Olivia, Roger) had been at their schools for some time, working up from the teacher ranks into administration. Of these four, Arlene and Nanette were already fully certified assistant principals, having successfully completed the AP academy. While Arlene seemed interested, Nanette had more pressing personal matters and was not seeking to become a principal. Olivia was not sure about going forward with certification; Roger was also not interested at the time. In ABC District, it was possible for the assistant principals to remain onboard as "temporarily assigned" and not yet be fully certified by central administration because of the shortage of administrators.

## **Findings**

### **Covering the Program's Content**

Over the school year, the professional development program was delivered with these five aspects: (a) content knowledge and skill development, (b) application to school standards, support, systems, (c) opportunity to network with peers and resource teachers, (d) conversations with principals, and (e) reflections for continuous learning. Structurally these aspects served as a useful frame for presenting the knowledge base for school leaders and fostering skills necessary for these participants to be successful.



In terms of content, the information delivered over the school year generally focused on performance appraisals, beginning with student learners and later faculty and staff. At the first meeting, participants were directed toward identifying specifically what these were for students (i.e., general learner outcomes and student achievement) as well as for themselves as prospective administrators. This was meant to promote the understanding of administrators as instructional leaders as well as ongoing lifelong learners themselves. Later, the meeting agendas included personnel matters like learning about state policy related to staff reductions, and reviewing the process for hiring and reviewing personnel.

The program content worked well in conjunction with the goal of having administrators conduct classroom observations in their schools. Assistant principals were asked to conduct at least 10 observations each month. The same was expected of principals and even the district superintendent doing school visits and classroom observations regularly. In addition, Sonia and I acting as supporting personnel were asked to go out to the schools for observations and walkabouts together with the APs.

Along with content, leadership skills were to be developed during the sessions. At each meeting, Superintendent Zane expressed wanting to work on communication skills as well as deliver information. Sonia was able to draw from Adaptive Schools techniques to work on communication skill building. At the April meeting, for instance, the participants shared their questions and concerns about conducting employee reviews by working in small groups with individuals taking on different roles. In groups of three, one person was the designated speaker who shared about the review process, another the listener working on pausing and paraphrasing, and the third person served as a meta-coach observing the two others. Learning ways to communicate more effectively was identified as an important aspect of improving leadership and developing assistants into principals.

Attention was given to the second aspect, how the content applied to standards, student support, and systems at the school, district and state-wide. Professional development was designed to do more with student support in discussing differentiated instruction and the statewide comprehensive student support system. Unfortunately that discussion was postponed. Perhaps the aspect that did not get much attention was application to systems, either systems that currently exist or that might need to be put in place for more consistent and effective organization. It was suggested that application to standards, student support, and systems would need to be ongoing if the central administration's strategic plans were to be achieved.

The third aspect, networking opportunities with peers, appeared to be developing over time. As assistant principals learned more about each other personally and professionally, they could also network more. During meetings, special activities enabled them to get better acquainted, as for example, at the January meeting, participants were asked to share about the "nicest present you got for Christmas." Learning more about each other per-

sonally, it was anticipated that they might connect outside of school and develop more trust in their relationships with each other. Also having the district's resource teachers at these meetings, the participants could become more aware of the support and services that the school district provided.

Connecting with the principals was the fourth aspect emphasized during professional development. The plan was to propose assignments having assistant principals communicate regularly with their principals about something learned or discussed at the professional development meetings. For example, in preparation for the February meeting, they were to talk with their principal about work responsibilities and the upcoming administrator evaluation. However, follow-up on these activities did not always happen.

Asking for reflections and feedback was meant to be a routine at the AP meetings. But the responses from the participants were often brief. This could have been because these reflections were requested at the end of the day when time was limited or insufficient to think about the day's meeting, raise any questions, or offer additional feedback. At the end of a long day, participants were eager to get on the road and back home, many traveling over an hour to return back to their communities.

In sum, the five aspects offered ways to think about what was delivered, how consistently, whether reinforced sufficiently, and whether the desired aims were met. There could have been different aspects employed, for instance, more specific to the content covered (e.g. school policy related to operations) or related to the performances expected (e.g. general learning outcomes for administrators). Whatever aspects were chosen, it was hoped that they served to direct the course of leadership planning, development, and delivery.

### **Interruptions in the Program**

In assessing how the school district was socializing its newest members, it was found that professional development was not always delivered as planned. While formal sessions had been organized by the university-school district partnership, and Superintendent Zane was sincerely committed to this professional development, numerous interruptions prevented delivery of the scheduled program. The reasons for these interruptions were as follows.

First, the superintendent was often called away for more pressing matters like a weekend fire at a high school, vandalism at the middle school, a gun incident/ firearms violation, and a fight involving a nearby charter school. These incidents required Superintendent Zane's immediate attention, taking her away from the scheduled sessions with the APs. Other interruptions related to state responsibilities; for example, Regina was expected to be at the opening of the state legislature along with the other district superintendents. She would need to spend the night in the state capital and fly back the next morning. As such, she advised us to go ahead without her being present at the AP session.

Usually after emergency incidents or events, Superintendent Zane would share what had happened, what procedures were in place (or not, as in the case of the weekend fire), and how decision-making should occur at the school and district levels. Covering this information was important because she informed the administrators about district policies, procedures, and work responsibilities. Regina made clear what she was doing and how she managed the crisis. For example, shortly after arriving at the April meeting, Regina received a phone call from the deputy superintendent who needed to be briefed about the discipline policy and a recent gun incident that had occurred. When “higher ups” like the deputy called, she told us that she needed to respond immediately. While Regina often shared with the AP group, doing so meant that regularly scheduled topics would be postponed or preempted.

A second reason for changes in the schedule related to specific presenters. Many guest speakers were from central administration and their scheduled visitation dates often changed. For example, at the second AP meeting, the presenters were preempted because their boss, an assistant superintendent, had suddenly resigned and staff needed to make changes accordingly. The announcement was made the morning of our meeting, thus altering the day’s agenda. In another case, the planning team had wanted to offer instruction on differentiated learning to accommodate diverse student learners. However, no date could be arranged with the specific presenters, again postponing the topic from one meeting to the next.

A third reason that changes occurred in professional development delivery related to the state system’s proprietary place in leadership training for new school administrators. The central administration had its own agenda, differing from the university-district partnership and offering mandatory training sessions through its leadership academy for assistant principals interested in certification. Of the eight, Terri and Norman were involved in these sessions. The academy also arranged and financed mentors like Sonia Stephens to support new principals at ABC and other districts. During the school year, Sonia was working with two elementary school principals in addition to this professional development for APs.

Understandably, the central administration personnel felt that professional development sessions needed to be delivered consistently across the 15 districts. While appreciating the training and mentoring efforts delivered and financed by central administration, the superintendent commented privately that these sessions took time away from daily school operations, especially since administrators were required to leave their island communities to attend these sessions. Further, the information presented was often general, not directed toward immediate needs in specific schools in their district.

Interruptions to the program and various modifications in schedule were said to be like “changes in the wind” for which the ABC District would simply have to adjust its scheduling of events accordingly.

## **Individual Responses to Professional Development**

According to Saks and Ashforth (1997), individuals can and do act independently, despite the directives of their organization. This was evident in the AP professional development as few assistant principals completed their homework assignments. As noted earlier, all were expected to make regular classroom visits and do at least 10 observations within the month. This expectation was established at the first meeting in November. Superintendent Zane felt that professional development needed to be linked to observations and made a point to emphasize the importance of these regular classroom visits. In addition, the three university-school district partners, Regina, Sonia and I would be visiting the schools and joining APs in doing classroom observations there.

However, by the third month, only three of the eight APs had completed all 10 classroom observations required in the month. Three other APs reported having done at least five. Ms. Zane asked, "What have you learned? What has been happening as a result of your class observations? Are standards being implemented at the classroom level?" Some APs felt less comfortable doing the observations, as Norman told us during a visit to his school. Having been an elementary school teacher prior to his appointment, he was not familiar with secondary school curricula. Just managing to get the 10 observations completed was a challenge, he said. Other APs said that they were too busy with other responsibilities. For example, Cecilia was on AP duty on the day we visited her school and while she did complete her scheduled visits, she could not participate in the debriefing afterwards. Arranging for the time to do observations and debriefing was difficult for the APs to manage.

By April, we were concerned that so few APs were doing the classroom observations and thus decided to scale back from 10 to 7 required each month. As if to explain why they were not doing these observations, the superintendent spoke about all the things that take up an administrator's time, like conducting special education meetings, managing personnel matters, handling student discipline, doing counseling, and other matters. In the end, the classroom observations expected of APs were not done at all. Thus, an important aspect of the administrators' professional development directly related to teaching and learning was not accomplished.

Another example of individual action related to how APs viewed their attendance at these professional development sessions. Often one or two APs were not present at meetings or might come and go during the day long sessions. At the November meeting, for example, Nanette could only come later in the morning because she needed to be at her high school. Roger had a doctor's appointment and needed to leave early from one AP meeting. Rochelle also needed to take her grandson to the doctor.

Occasionally, an AP would ask to leave before the 4:00 p.m. closing but more often they would slip out in the afternoon. Notably at one

meeting, when Roger started to leave around 2:35 p.m., Superintendent Zane asked him about directions to his school as he was hosting the next gathering. He informed the group that he would send email directions about driving and parking at his school. Rarely were individuals “called out” as Roger had been when leaving early. Later in private, Regina commented about the attendance issue, saying that principals should be making arrangements for their assistants to be attending trainings, not scheduling school meetings or requiring them to stay at school on professional development days.

## Discussion

In this study, the leadership preparation of newly appointed assistant principals featured aspects that are characterized in exemplary programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Orr, 2011; Orr & Barber, 2007; Pounder, 2011). These features included a comprehensive approach to professional practice, grounded in instructional leadership practices; attention to skill development; and supportive program structures for networking, mentoring and peer coaching. Many of these aspects were present at least in the design stage as part of the planning process. These also reflected transference from the professional socialization of academic study to that of organizational socialization and induction in field experiences onsite.

Given that modifications in schedules will always occur when programs are being implemented, it was important to document what was actually delivered in terms of professional development. To look at this, organizational socialization served as a useful theoretical framework to consider the teaching and learning occurring in the AP program. What was actually taught in the sessions? What were the responses from individual participants? What might this suggest about how these specific individuals were being groomed to become heads of their respective schools?

The first observation was that changes in the schedule appeared to trump whatever was on the agenda. Despite the planning and commitment to professional development, the interruptions and modifications to the schedule ruled the day. It appeared that what was taught over the course of the year was the need for flexibility and adaptability. Even Superintendent Zane had to remain flexible with pressing matters like the fire or gun incident and urgent requests from central administration. By sharing her own reflections of how to prioritize what to do, the superintendent offered the APs insight into her thinking and decision-making. These reflections shared by a mentor can contribute to internalizing the values and norms of school leaders (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004).

A second observation was that hierarchy made a difference. When central administration scheduled some session, it took precedent over whatever else was planned at the district or school level. Staff personnel were shuffled accordingly as was the case when the assistant superinten-

dent resigned suddenly and presenters had to cancel a session. Likewise, Superintendent Zane was subject to the changes without much control. Indicating her own frustration over this, she commented that “higher ups called the shots.” This view reinforced the top-down management of the school system from central administration to school level, contrasting with the literature advocating more shared and collaborative leadership directed toward prioritizing teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Orr, 2011; Pounder, 2011).

A third observation was that assistant principals maintained their own agency, acting independently in their respective schools. This was observed in their responding to the expectation they would complete a specific number of classroom visits during the month. Few APs did complete those observations, allowing other duties to take precedent. Rather than completing 10 observations in a month, Norman opted to prioritize his administrative work, emphasizing other aspects like working with cafeteria staff, handling discipline, and making his presence felt on a large high school campus.

With these three observations in mind, the socialization of these rural school assistant principals can be seen as contextualized and dynamic. It must be understood not as a stand-alone program of professional development but rather invested in a school district and supported by its leadership. Research studies indicate how district partners play key roles in recruiting, selecting, and ultimately retaining potential administrators (Browne-Ferrigno & Allen, 2006; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). In the case of this study, professional development was delivered at multiple levels directed by central, district, and school administrations. Recognizing all three levels of administration as integral to organizational socialization offers the appropriate context for understanding how to deliver effective professional development. Further, it would be necessary to consider how relationships are built across all levels, the school being the “front lines” but the district and central administration viewed as important partners in making for shared authentic leadership preparation that works for recruiting, retaining and promoting excellent rural school leaders.

AP socialization must also be considered from the viewpoint of its participants, actively engaged in thinking and doing what was most important and relevant for their schools as well as themselves. In examining organizational socialization processes impacting the passage from teacher to administrator, Armstrong (2010) found novice vice principals subject to pervasive pressures forcing them into custodial disciplinary roles, counter to their ideals of leadership. Bredeson (2003) states that effective leaders need to balance what others expect of them (role taking) with their own priorities and goals (role making). For assistant principals, this can be tricky because of their subordinate position but their active involvement in professional development can lead to greater desire and success in becoming principals (Walker & Kwan, 2009).

As a result of this study, I would emphasize the need to view participants as individuals capable of making informed decisions about their career and work. Rather than constrain independent actions, participants might be encouraged to take on the role of instructional leader by assuming responsibility for leading professional development sessions and supporting the learning of their cohort of administrators. The district and central administration could also seek to better understand individual APs' needs and desires in order to support them through their administrative careers over the long term.

### **Implications for Researchers and Practitioners**

This study provided an exploratory look at how a professional development program instigated through a university-school district partnership served to socialize newly appointed assistant principals in rural settings. It employed an organizational socialization framework to examine what was done, to whom, and to what end. Consideration was given to how professional development was actually delivered over the course of a school year, what interruptions occurred, and how individuals responded to various aspects of that program.

Qualitative inquiry used to study this program was appropriate but challenging because the researcher was also an active participating partner in the development and delivery of the program. Not only did it involve extensive observations, formal and informal interviewing, and written analyses, but it meant balancing the researcher's critique with a partner's support of collaboration and mutual respect. Both aspects were important to making the university-district partnership work. What was most helpful was that after the actual observations and field work were completed, I could step back to analyze, reflect upon, and re-develop my own inquiry about what had happened. Van Maanen (1988) suggests ways to "keep the pressure on ethnographers to continue experimenting with and reflecting on the ways social reality is represented" (p. x).

Much more research can be done to investigate socialization structures and processes for assistant principals from onsite program delivery to enactment in school settings. For example, more might be done to look at professional development rites, rituals, and/or ceremonies as socialization tactics that convey expected behaviors and reinforce organizational roles and structures (Armstrong, 2010). Beyond traditional methods of socialization, it might be useful to consider the role of other social agencies (e.g., professional associations, business and community groups) in leadership preparation and engagement (Crow, 2006).

Empirical studies might focus on the changes in school organizations and responses from prospective to seasoned administrators in school districts. Through longitudinal quantitative as well as qualitative studies, more might be learned about socializing new recruits into educational ad-

ministration and how they fare over time. For example, Bauer and Brazer (2011) considered new principals' isolation in relation to self efficacy as part of a three-year study. A similar kind of longitudinal study might examine those beginning as assistant principals and follow their socialization over time.

Further, research about rural school districts will be needed to understand the challenges faced by leaders in geographically isolated areas. This might be accomplished by contrasting leadership development in two or more rural districts facing similar challenges with geographic isolation and dwindling community resources. In addition, researchers could examine the differences of educational leader retention and recruitment in a rural school district contrasted with urban and/or suburban districts with high need and similar student demographics.

For practitioners in university-school district partnership programs, this study supported attempts to engage in meaningful relationships that blend theory and practice, foster university and school district collaboration while adhering to principles of instructional leadership. As suggested by Darling-Hammond et al. (2009), district-based in-service programs can provide a way to "develop practice in practice through a well connected set of learning opportunities that are informed by a coherent view of teaching and learning and grounded in both theory and practice" (p. 151).

At the conclusion of ABC's yearlong professional development, I offered specific recommendations to the district that included (a) maintaining program consistency while still allowing for flexible scheduling, (b) encouraging APs to demonstrate their instructional leadership by leading professional development sessions, (c) including opportunities for acknowledgements and more personal reflections, and (d) communicating and coordinating better with central administration in program delivery. These next steps were shared with APs as well as school principals. The following school year, more effort was made to have school principals and assistants in one community meet together. These kinds of changes offered alternative ways to think about how the university-district partnership could better deliver professional development.

To successfully design, develop and sustain instructional leadership in rural schools, professional development must be considered over the long term. Our group had thought about a two to three year rollout, but perhaps even longer periods might be needed to ensure that change happens consistently and offers adequate socialization into the work of reforming and improving schools especially those in rural, geographically isolated areas.

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